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THE CAREER AND THE WORDS OF WASHINGTON

Certainly at a time like this, though we may hope to say little, if anything, now, we can, whether Democrats or Republicans, without debate or controversy, take counsel with ourselves as to some of the underlying considerations which have made our Nation what it is, and which, if adhered to, will keep it strong and righteous and capable of resolving the doubts and surviving the dangers likely to confront us as time goes on; and to what wellspring so refreshing and invigorating can we better have recourse than to the career and to the words of Washington!

ADDRESS OF HON. OSCAR W. UNDERWOOD OF ALABAMA

DELIVERED AT THE ANNUAL BANQUET OF THE
STATE SOCIETY OF THE CINCINNATI, HELD
IN PHILADELPHIA, PA., ON WASH-
INGTON'S BIRTHDAY

FEBRUARY 22, 1912



WASHINGTON
1912



Gilt
Author
(Person)

ADDRESS
OF
HON. OSCAR W. UNDERWOOD.

"Surely by no other body could this great anniversary of the Nation be more appropriately celebrated than by your society of splendid traditions, for Washington not only took an important part in its formation, but, in large measure, became its directing head during the early days when its continued existence was threatened by adverse criticism.

"Those of you who enjoy membership in this society may well be congratulated, for it is a privilege greater than membership in any order of aristocracy or nobility of however distinguished rank or origin, because eligibility for it means that you can trace your ancestry back to the great men who served this Nation in an accomplishment which has had more to do than any other single event with the shaping of the political progress not only of this country but of the world.

IMPORTANCE OF COMMEMORATIVE EXERCISES.

"All of us, however, that have not this privilege may have a share which should not yield even to you in gratitude to those who wrought such momentous things. And it is on such occasions as this, which are altogether too few, that duty and interest as well should prompt us to resolve to see to it that grave matters affecting the public welfare shall not hereafter, as often as they have been in the past, be subordinated to our personal or political affairs. In such a way we shall make the wisest use of this day.

"The place and the time are not appropriate for us to attempt anything like an inventory of our assets as a people, for, as men of different political faith, we might not be in accord as to how the inventory should be taken. There are some acqui-

tions we have made which, from my point of view, are to be regarded as unfortunate, since in securing them it may be said that we have overlooked what concerned our national well-being. All of us at times are capable of forgetting that things in life have a relative as well as an absolute value. If, in obtaining something, we have lost something, we are not, in making up the items of our resources, whether national or personal, to disregard the debits; but we are to have a balance sheet so that we know how it really is with us. The headlong rush for possessions or advantage exposes us to the risk of many a rough fall; and as time goes on the homely adage, 'All is not gain that is got into the purse,' has a widening application to nations as well as to men.

SUBJECT STATED.

"Yet certainly at a time like this, though we may hope to say little, if anything, new, we can, whether Democrats or Republicans, without debate or controversy, take counsel with ourselves as to some of the underlying considerations which have made our Nation what it is, and which, if adhered to, will keep it strong and righteous and capable of resolving the doubts and surmounting the dangers likely to confront us as time goes on; and to what wellspring so refreshing and invigorating can we better have recourse than to the career and to the words of Washington! Some of us have no great respect for the so-called referendum; but we all ought to approve of a referendum of what politically is new and untried and uncertain and of doubtful worth to his counsel, from which proceeded always light and judgment.

HONOR ROLL OF THE FOUNDERS.

"It is an inspiration to the loyal American citizen merely to call the roll of the men in whose brain and heart was born the conception of the Republic, who laid its foundations so deep and lasting that there is no height to which we might not build, whereon to keep burning a great light for our guidance and for the guidance of all people; who drew a Declaration of Independence which voiced, as it has never been voiced before, the longing of men for political liberty; who carried the Colonies through a well-nigh hopeless struggle; who devised the Articles

of Confederation—that ‘firm league of friendship’—as a *modus vivendi* for a people under arms, and then supplemented it with a Constitution that welded together into an indissoluble Union the interests to which war had given only temporary cohesion—a Constitution which, under the interpretation of John Marshall, was to be, as he said, a document not of definition but of enumeration, and therefore of increasing and broadening significance such as perhaps no other similar writing before has ever had.

“‘There were giants in the earth in those days.’ In no other period in our history, or perhaps of the history of the world, were there gathered together so many gifted men, each with his special capacity for contribution to the success of a nation’s cause, as Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, Madison, Patrick Henry, the Adamases, Edmund Randolph, Robert Morris, Charles Carroll, of Carrollton, and James Wilson, too, so intimately identified with this Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and all the other heroes of discontent, of war, of reconstruction, or of the establishment of the Union.

“To shine at all in such a galaxy was to shed a great light; but the calm and steady light of Washington was, by common consent, the brightest in glory there. In peculiar equipment for each class of work required to be done, he may have been outshone. The protest against English misrule may have come from better-disciplined minds than his; even more brilliant military resourcefulness than he possessed there may have been; in constructive statesmanship he perhaps had his superiors; in knowledge of the political problems to be worked out by the American Colonies through a constitutional form of government, his insight was not always the clearest.

CENTRAL FIGURE OF THE TIMES.

“Nevertheless, it can be confidently said that Washington combined in himself, more than did anyone else, a greater number of those unique qualities essential to make what might easily have been a crude experiment of revolt a success upon which the world still looks with increasing admiration. In the prosecution of the war with unrivaled patience under disheartening conditions and numberless privations and cruel disap-

pointments; in his contribution to the steps leading up to the Constitutional Convention, during all the time from the first meeting of the Virginia and Maryland commissioners down to the calling and holding of the convention; in his advice to that convention and in his presiding over it; in his administration of the Presidency, where he put aside the petty things of politics; in his relinquishment of office when, for the asking, it was within his possession during all the years of his life, Washington, in influence and wisdom and judgment, is the central figure of those times, and in just fame stands alone. And should we ask ourselves to-night which of these men could have been spared in the work that was accomplished, we could not, with all our admiration for any other man, conceive the outcome as it was without the commanding presence of Washington.

“He did not foresee all the perplexing problems with which we have to deal to-day in our tariff or in our great corporations, in our currency, in our foreign possessions, or in a reconciliation of the rights of labor and capital; he did not foresee the vast task we all have, whether native or foreign born, of taking the new material constantly coming to our shores and assimilating it into our growth and molding it into a loyal and intelligent support of our institutions; he did not foresee the menace of destructive socialism nor the extent to which, unfortunately, we were to go in substituting party interest for political principle, though as to this he gave us paternal warning. Nevertheless he did foresee sufficient of our problems to be able to commend to us a course the principles of which, if steadily adhered to, should bring us safely through all the perils to which we may be exposed. While he did not outline the by-laws, so to speak, that must, from time to time, be framed and adopted for the detailed life of this country, he did understand as no one else understood the organic principles upon which were to rest the security and the welfare of our national life. And subject always to his urgent advice against permanent alliances with foreign powers, like a high-priest among men he preached the gospel of tolerance, of benevolence, of peace, of reasonableness, and of righteousness toward all peoples.

"Not without faults, not without limitations of intelligence or of those qualities which go to make up the perfect man, Washington manifested in word and deed the best that has gone to dignify and make great and honored American manhood. When there is taken into consideration what he did for us and for the peoples of the earth that have followed or are ready to adopt our example by transferring so much of his conceptions and accomplishment as may be made to take root and grow in their soils; what he did toward establishing the principle that men have the capacity to govern themselves, and that those chosen to represent the people are to be their servants and not their rulers, and that public officials are engaged in the administration of a trust; when we consider that but for his triumphant leadership this Republic would never, perhaps, have been born, and that but for the example of his successful administration of the Presidency the experiment of self-government might have collapsed or retrograded into a kingdom, we must all agree that Washington performed a service for us and our posterity and for all the nations of the earth greater than any like service ever performed by the nobility or the genius or the sacrifice of any other one man.

FAREWELL ADDRESS.

"To appreciate the bold outlines of his personality and at the same time the patriarchal attitude he was entitled to assume toward the Republic, which was so much of his own making, we have only to read his Farewell Address—that wonderful product of affection and intelligence and insight. We can not think of it as written by any one of his contemporaries. The tone of it forbids this. Not one of them could have made use of its language without being open to the charge of affectation or arrogance. The words of dignity and injunction and warning came naturally from him, for they were the words of the guardian to the Nation as his ward, or, as he said, of an old and affectionate friend. He was the Gamaliel at whose feet the people sought wisdom. He was, in truth, the Father of his Country, as he enjoined upon us all those virtues and practices which can keep us strong and just and prosperous at home and respected in the councils of the world.

LESSONS OF HIS LIFE—CHARACTERISTICS.

"So many are the lessons we can gather from his life and his work that one is justified in saying that on an occasion like this the time is too limited even to enumerate them. Yet there are one or two things which we may well recall at a time when so many of us are disposed to seize upon the first expedient which seems to make for popularity or progress and when old-fashioned truths give way to strange doctrine: for, unlike many of us, he did not, in conduct or in speech, seem of the view that a thing is necessarily valuable because it is new. Courageous, but regardful of the value of precedent, certainly with truth it can be said that he had what a distinguished foreign diplomat recently declared we as a people have—the tenacity of tradition and the audacity of progress.

"The lines of calm serenity and determination along which Washington worked out his life were rarely varied. Persistent of purpose, he was never obstinate or unreasonable in judgment nor without the realization that the means to be selected must have reference to the end to be attained: he did not make of consistency a fetish, but change of plan with him was a matter of deliberation and conviction; he accommodated the plans of his official life, as he did his plans as a general, to the need of the hour, making use of all the resources he could command for the purpose of influencing men by conversion to a course of action believed by him to favor the successful outcome of worthy effort. Not without a shrewdness far beyond that which we are accustomed to attribute to him, he never resorted to measures or methods that were cheap or beneath his dignity. Seeing great visions, he was no mere dreamer or dreamer; and what he accomplished for political liberty in association with the development of our national prosperity is an object lesson to us all that the ideal may go hand in hand with the practical for the realization of its highest ambition. He was patient and forbearing under unjust censure and coarse libel, and displayed charity toward friends and enemies as each class had the need for it; he could be what so many of us find it impossible to be—temperate in speech and conduct and considerate of the opinions of others; but when the occasion forbade it he made no sur-

render to compromise. The choice of no party for elevation to office and the free of undue partisan zeal, he recognized the likelihood that party lines must be reckoned with; he adhered always to the fundamental things upon which the character of nations must be built if they are to be enduring; and above all he has never been weighed in the balance by posterity and been found wanting in that sincerity which, in the end, is the convincing argument, the best strategy, and the surest way to keep our self-respect.

DISTINGUISHING COMMON SENSE AND PRACTICAL TURN OF MIND.

His distinguishing common sense and practical turn of mind served him well in the administration of his high office. Few, if any, mere generalities or quixotic schemes for action were suggested by him; but, on the contrary, he seemed to be master of the underlying principles of the business needs of the country as he had been of the plans of his campaigns. At a time when so many of us are disposed to put upon the statute book nostrums for relief from our industrial and financial and economic evils, it will be well for us to call to mind the striking contrast between the moderate volume and temperate character of laws enacted during his Presidency and so much of our present-day legislation of the experimental sort, reflecting often merely a view of to-day that is likely to be the heresy of to-morrow, and attempting to deal with the objectionable tendency before it is seen that it will not be arrested of itself, or before we have sufficient understanding of it to be in a position to know or apply the appropriate remedy. Accordingly the recommendations and the legislation of Washington's administration were not along crosswork lines; but the elements of soberness, patience, and wisdom which he so invariably manifested were typical of the plans he favored and adopted to bring order out of financial and industrial chaos, promote industry among the people, and restore their energies by opening up new sources of revenue and prosperity, and by assuring men that they should gather and be secure in the possession of the harvest of their labor. In all this he held true to the promise of his messages to Congress and to all his utterances and acts, and justified the expectation of the Nation—that he was to be as

faithful and intelligent a servant in the work of peace as he had been amid the struggle for independence.

"While believing that free intercourse with nations would, to use his own words, promote policy, harmony, and interest, he did not part company with statesmanship, for he added:

"There can be no greater error than to expect or calculate upon real favors from nation to nation; it is an illusion which experience must cure and which a just pride ought to discard.

CO-ORDINATE BRANCHES OF THE GOVERNMENT TO BE KEPT IN
THEIR RESPECTIVE BOUNDARIES.

"There is a great need, too, for us in this day when constitutional restraint has become irksome to many, never to turn a deaf ear to the stirring appeal of Washington to his people—that the departments into which our Government is constitutionally divided shall be kept with determined hand within their respective boundaries. Speaking here not as a party man but as a citizen of the Republic, my observation and reflection have shown me how treacherously easy is the transition from centralization of government—which those of the Republican Party set so much store by and which a good many of us Democrats are inclined to acquiesce in—to a personalization of government and then to usurpation of government. Washington in all his career uttered no greater truth than when he declared that a constitutional government, under such circumstances, becomes almost as a matter of course, a despotism. For a long time, fortunately, this was the view of the American people; and when they have departed from it a long and ominous step has been taken, not only in the commission of error but toward establishing evil precedent.

"Said he in his stately language:

"It is important, likewise, that the habits of thinking in a free country should inspire caution in those intrusted with its administration, to confine themselves within their respective constitutional spheres, avoiding in the exercise of the powers of one department to encroach upon another. The spirit of encroachment tends to consolidate the powers of all the departments in one, and thus to create, whatever the form of government, a real despotism. A just estimate of that love of power and preponence to abuse it, which predominates in the human heart, is sufficient to satisfy us of the truth of this position. The necessity of reciprocal check, in the exercise of political power, by dividing and distributing it into different depositaries, and constituting each the guardian of the public weal against invasions by the others, has been evinced by experiments ancient and modern; some of them in our coun-

try and under our own eyes. To preserve them must be as necessary as to institute them. If, in the opinion of the people, the distribution or modification of the constitutional powers be in any particular wrong, let it be corrected by an amendment in the way which the Constitution designates. But let there be no change by usurpation; for though this, in one instance, may be the instrument of good, it is the customary weapon by which free governments are destroyed. The precedent must always greatly overbalance in permanent evil any partial or transient benefit which the use can at any time yield.

"Years afterwards Daniel Webster merely put into the matchless eloquence of his paraphrase this thought when he directed his protest at apparently so slight a departure from this principle as the proposal of the President to take from the proper Cabinet officer the right to determine upon the depository of the funds of the United States:

"It was strongly and forcibly urged yesterday by the honorable Member from South Carolina that the true and only mode of preserving any balance of power in mixed governments is to keep an exact balance. This is very true, and to this end encroachments must be resisted at the first step. The question is, therefore, whether, upon the true principles of the Constitution, this exercise of power by the President can be justified. Whether the consequences be prejudicial or not, if there be an illegal exercise of power it is to be resisted in the proper manner. Even if no harm or inconvenience results from transgressing the boundary, the intrusion is not to be suffered to pass unnoticed. Every encroachment, great or small, is important enough to awaken the attention of those who are intrusted with the preservation of a constitutional government. We are not to wait till great public mischiefs come, till the Government is overthrown, or liberty itself put into extreme jeopardy. We should not be worthy sons of our fathers were we so to regard great questions affecting the general feeling. Those fathers accomplished the Revolution on a strict question of principle. The Parliament of Great Britain asserted a right to tax the Colonies in all cases whatsoever; and it was precisely on this question that they made the Revolution turn. The amount of taxation was trifling, but the claim itself was inconsistent with liberty; and that was, in their eyes, enough. It was against the recital of an act of Parliament, rather than against any suffering under its enactments, that they took up arms. They went to war against a preamble. They fought seven years against a declaration. They poured out their treasures and their blood like water in a contest against an assertion which those less sagacious and not so well schooled in the principles of civil liberty would have regarded as barren phraseology or mere parade of words. They saw in the claim of the British Parliament a seminal attitude of mischief, the germ of unjust power; they detected it, dragged it forth from underneath its plausible disguises, struck at it; nor did it elude either their steady eye or their well-directed blow till they had extirpated it and destroyed it to the smallest fiber. On this question of principle, while actual suffering was yet afar off, they raised their flag against the power to which, for purposes of foreign contest and subrogation, Rome, in the height of her glory, is not to be compared; a power which is dotted over the surface of the whole globe with her possessions and military posts, whose morning drum beat, following the

sun and keeping company with the hours, circles the earth with one continuous and unbroken strain of the martial airs of England.

"The necessity of holding strictly to the principles upon which free governments are constructed, and to those precise lines which fix the partitions of power between different branches, is as plain, if not as cogent, as that of resisting, as our fathers did, the strides of the parent country against the rights of the Colonies; because, whether the power which exceeds its just limits be foreign or domestic, whether it be the encroachment of all branches on the rights of the people, or that of one branch on the rights of others, in either case the balanced and well-adjusted machinery of free government is disturbed, and, if the derangement go on, the whole system must fall.

CHARACTER OF WASHINGTON.

"At all times and amid all conditions Washington rang true to the note of a splendid manhood. Hypocrisy and a trafficking in expedients for popular applause no more match with his life than the crime of murder. He had little of the captivating style of speech or manner; but regard for the nobility of his character, rather than any rhetorical art or charm of personal address on his part, kept wavering lines from retreat in battle and from mutiny amid privations and suffering to which our neglect had exposed the soldiers of the Revolution. The men in the ranks and above the ranks were zealots, ready to be shot to death or starved to death or frozen to death for the sake of such an inspiring leader, even when the Colonies had forgotten to clothe and to feed them after they had carried victorious arms in this unequal contest with the greatest military power in the world. He suppressed the dissensions of the men he gathered about him for the administration of his high office, and lessened their antagonism; and, as a man of affairs and the possessor of wealth, he had so mastered essential business principles that he knew how, by encouraging manufacture and thrift and enterprise, to bind up the wounds of a people wasted and impoverished by the exhaustion of prolonged war. What a priceless possession to his countrymen is the splendid record of the achievements of such a many-sided, well-balanced, noble man.

"So all discussion of Washington ends—whether it be in the brief address or in the pages of the biographer or historian—with panegyric, and without the opportunity of the most exacting criticism to point to any conspicuous act of his which we to-day would wish to have otherwise, either for his fame or for the example of his life.

"No wonder that Webster said—

"America has furnished to the world the character of Washington. And if our American institutions had done nothing else, that alone would have entitled them to the respect of mankind.

"He stands among the great men of this country and among the great men of all countries, not only on the many pedestals of our handiwork, but on the eminence of our admiration and gratitude, as a splendid, commanding, heroic figure, the embodiment of those traits which go to make up true manhood and true greatness in the world. What Tennyson not unfairly said of Wellington can even more justly be said of Washington—that he both saved and served the State; that for him the path of duty was the way to glory, and that there should be eternal honor to his name.

PRESENT-DAY PROBLEMS OF THE REPUBLIC.

"And let us and all-loyal Americans resolve that the spirit of Washington, so manifestly in the midst of us on such occasions as this, shall go with us, as with gratitude and hope renewed and loins girded about we face the future. That future will not open for us always a pleasant prospect. We shall not always be blessed with prosperous times. Corresponding to those temporary setbacks to our health wherein Nature gives her warnings whenever we are making too great a draft upon mind or body, we shall have our periodical depressions when we are imprudent in the affairs of our business life. These need not unduly concern us, for, as we come to have a stable currency and a better understanding of the economic workings of the laws of supply and demand and do not overlook some considerations which are not always in accord with the strife for mere money return, these depressions should be appreciably less and less in number and importance.

"We have, however, problems of a more serious nature confronting us for solution, and doubtless they will increase as time goes on. We, as a people, have tolerated the doing of things which must be undone or made right and not condoned; we have at times set too much store by mere material success and judged as of minor consequence things which broaden and elevate and ennoble a nation; we have made compromise with

things of evil import. We have at times been unmindful of the rights of others as we have hurried on to the realization of ambitious plans, and in our indifference to the demands of good citizenship we have been guilty of or acquiesced in a course of conduct that has given rise to sullen expressions of an unrest to which we can not afford to be unconcerned listeners, for unchecked unrest is likely to breed discontent and discontent, in its turn, disorder. And unless we frankly recognize this we shall have no reasonable hope of correcting the conditions which arouse, if they do not altogether justify, those expressions, and which are a menace not only to our continuing prosperity but to our self-respect and our repute in the world. Again and again, as time goes on, in obedience to popular clamor, we shall be tempted to enact statutes unjust to labor or capital and not representing reflection and conviction, or statutes which are fairly certain to be incapable of enforcement and to bring the administration of the law into contempt. We shall be tempted to hesitate and temporize concerning things demanding prompt and courageous action for the public welfare. Again and again we shall stand perplexed in which direction to go when we shall have come to the crossroads of public duty and mere party expediency or even self-interest. Our way will be so shut in by doubt that we shall hesitate even as to a single step forward and upward. But there is one thing above all things to which we may cling with a certain faith, that so long as we keep with ourselves a covenant to return to and abide by the principles of Washington's Farewell Address, so long as his character shall be remembered and revered by us, so long as we shall set his life and his devotion before us as the best type and example of American citizenship to admire and emulate, this country can not falter in true progress nor in the end come short of its high mission in the world. For then, during all time to come, we shall have for our political guidance as a people the inspiration of his presence, which will be to us what for the moral guidance of men the Word of the Lord was to the psalmist of old—a lamp unto the feet and a light unto the path."



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